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Full Page Ads

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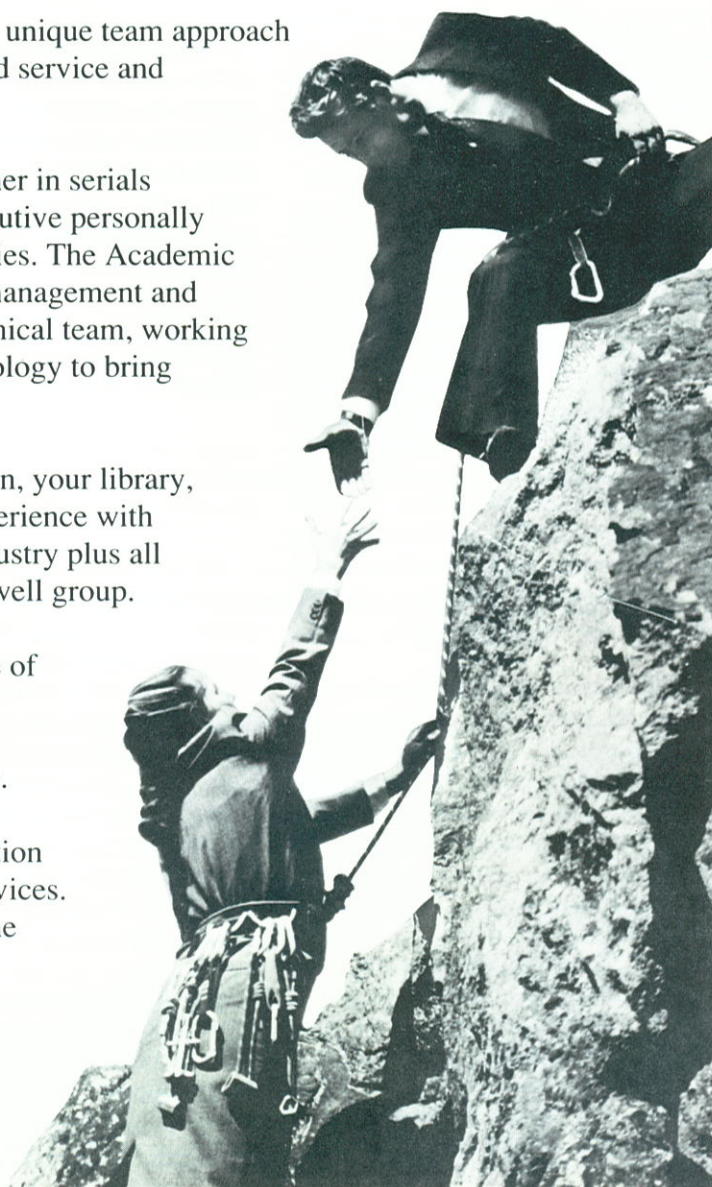
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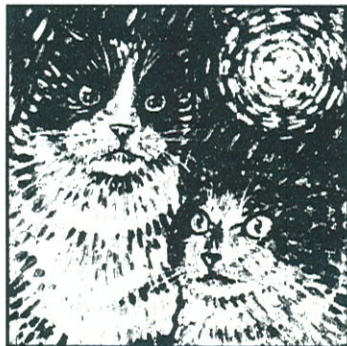
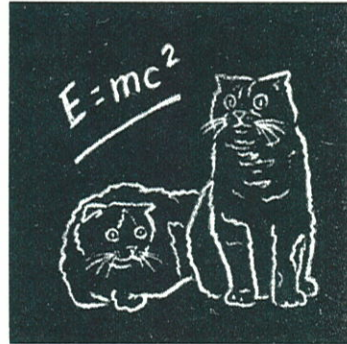
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To that end, Elsevier Science Publishers worldwide has developed various systems to control the circulation and monitor the status of submitted papers. One example, the Manuscript Tracking System (MTS), was created and implemented by Elsevier Science Publishing Co., Inc., New York, and illustrates how an effective manuscript management system enhances the peer review process.

ENVISIONING THE BENEFITS

In the interests of our readers, the benefit of using a computerized selection process in a sizeable database of reviewers is seen as a way of heightening the quality of the science published in an Elsevier journal. It precludes the human tendency to draw upon the same referee repeatedly perhaps to the exclusion of a well-qualified but less-encumbered reviewer. Improving the quality and breadth of the reviews naturally extends into improving the quality of the journal itself.

In the interests of our authors, the benefit of maximizing effectiveness of a busy editorial staff was equally clear. In the case of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, the editorial office handled over 1600 manuscripts in 1991. Application of the computer to clerical functions could optimize an author's chances for speedy publication by allowing staff to closely monitor the process of peer review.

But exactly how does the implementation of MTS do this?

FOLLOWING THE PROCESS

The system first documents a manuscript when it is received for consideration for publication (see flow chart right). A manuscript record is created indicating title and all authors. In addition, the record carries important management information such as correspondent author, anticipated color illustration, number of manuscript pages, estimated typeset length of the article, number of figures, tables, reference pages, transfer of copyright, linked manuscripts and, most important to the peer review process, a listing by code of the principal subjects covered in the paper.

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ENHANCING PEER REVIEW SELECTION

The editorial staff must proceed to selection of appropriate reviewers. Having pre-set a dozen different variable criteria to establish fair review of a paper, the staff requests the system to generate a listing of reviewers from its database of editorial board members and internationally selected reviewers who are qualified according to the subject codes input earlier. The criteria include allowances which must be made for availability of a reviewer, any requested reviews still pending from that individual, exclusion of any reviewer at the same institution as the paper's author — many aspects of reviewer selection which can most speedily be accomplished by computer selection.

The system generates a listing of reviewers who meet the specific criteria, and ranks those reviewers according to qualification, quality of past reviews completed and average length of time the reviewer takes to respond. After further screening by the editorial staff, letters are generated by the system to the reviewers finally chosen. After a pre-defined period, the system can dispatch letters to tactfully remind individuals of any outstanding review obligations.

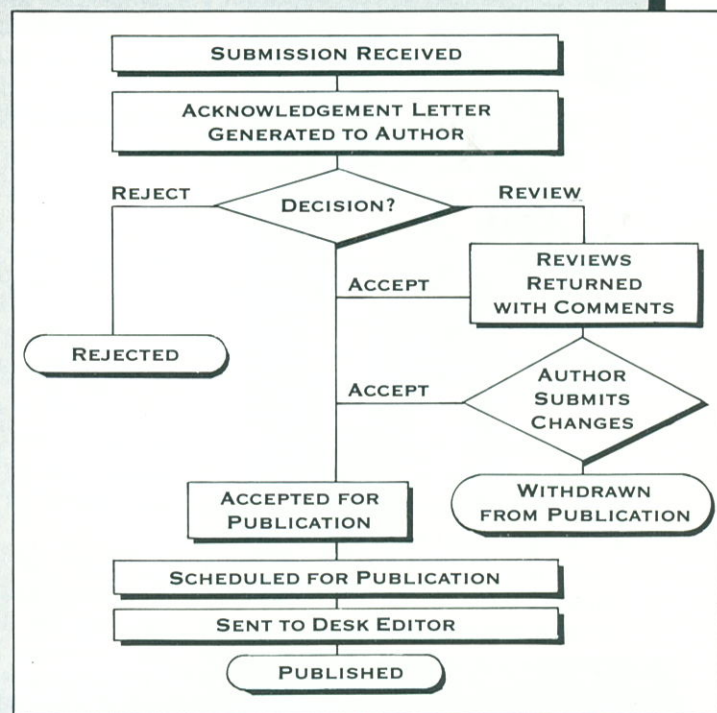
ACCESSING MANUSCRIPT INFORMATION

After the author submits requested changes and revisions (another aspect MTS tracks for each paper), the system monitors the scheduling of the paper's appearance in a specific issue. The editorial office has the capacity now to check an appropriate screen for answers to an author's scheduling query as well as alert the journal staff to any remaining editorial needs, such as a missing transfer of copyright.

To maximize the efficiency of the publisher, MTS provides a range of status reports indicating work in progress. The system also provides statistical information regarding manuscript submission rates, activity and processing rates, reviewer loads, response time and review quality. Perhaps a special symposium issue is going to exceed the budgeted number of pages — an item of importance to both editorial and production staff. MTS can generate a listing of articles scheduled for a particular issue for inspection — perhaps a quick call to the printer is necessary to accommodate any fast-breaking special requirements.

Finally, the system logs in the final publication date of each manuscript.

After using the system for nearly two years, Ruth Ohman, executive editor of the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, assures us, "No one would want to return to the old paper and pencil, card-file system, or the hand-written notes, or the misplaced file copies after using MTS."

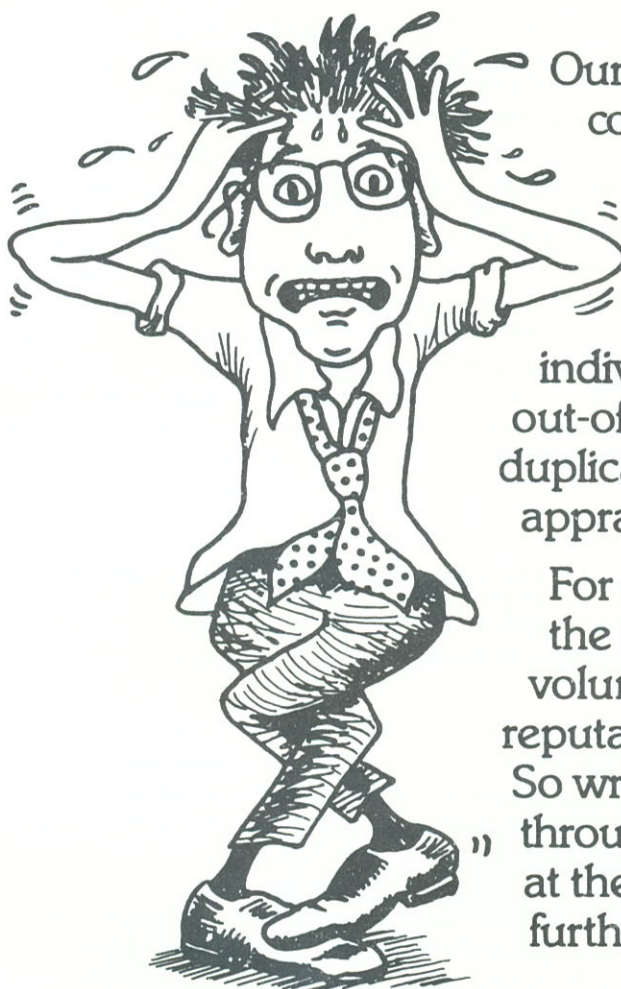


ADDITIONAL SYSTEMS TO COME

This particular form of a manuscript tracking system has proven successful in Elsevier's U.S. editorial offices of both the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* and *Annals of Thoracic Surgery* and its use will be expanded to more journals in 1992. At the same time, similar systems have been developed for some of Elsevier's leading European journals, such as *Brain Research* and *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta*, and the coming year will see smaller, less complex systems introduced for groups of journals in other areas such as the earth sciences.

The reaction from both editors and authors has been enthusiastic as these automated systems have improved the time and quality parameters of the peer review process. The coming year will see even wider applications as manuscript tracking systems become integral to the administration of many more Elsevier journals.

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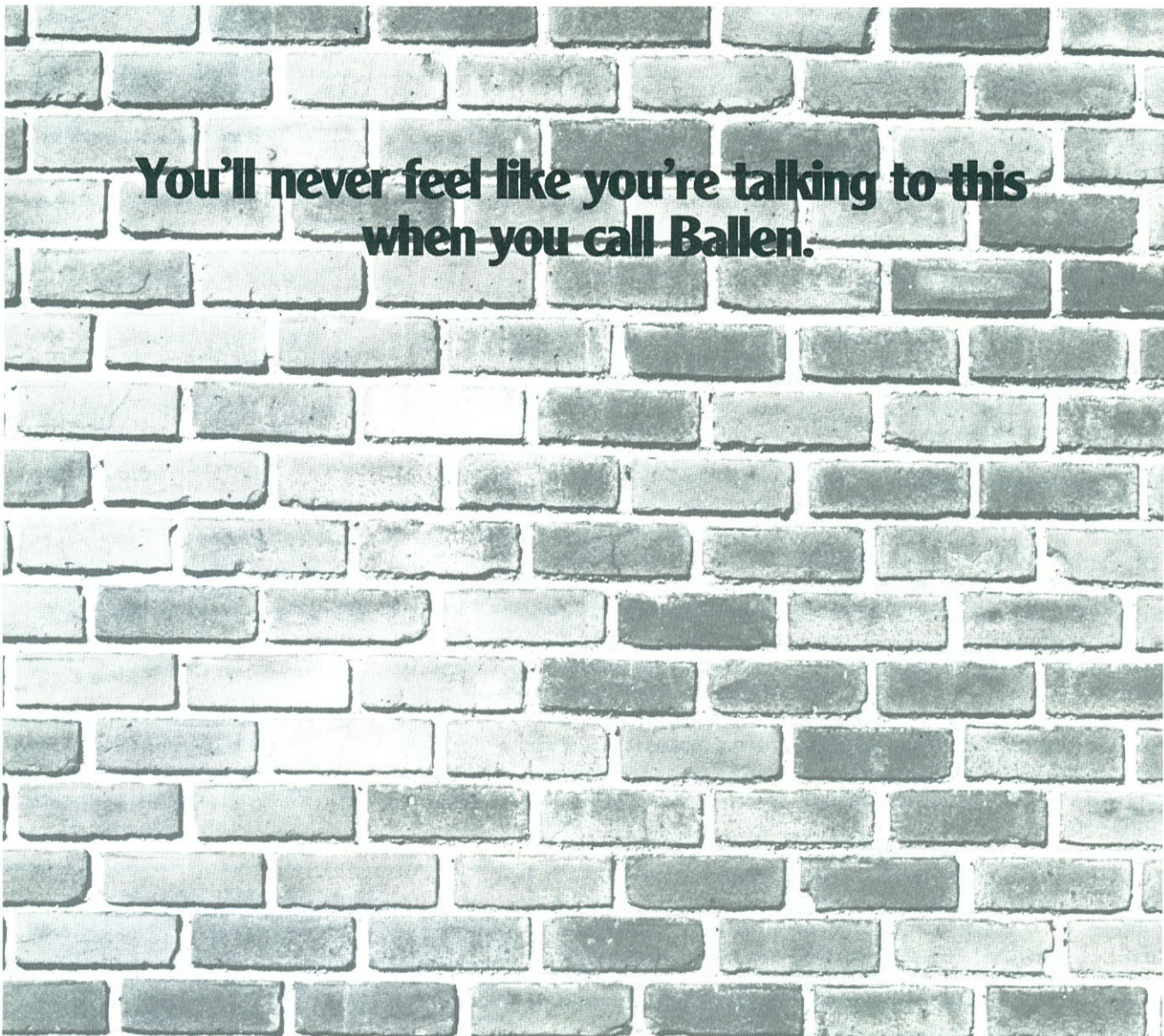
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